

Enhancing your Personal Statement

If you have been captain of the football team, lead role in the school show and founding member of the debating society you will have lots to mention on your personal statement. However, in truth, many students have to think about enhancing their personal statement because as a busy student there is only so much time for activities which enhance your academic profile.

What are you including in your statement?

Dependent on the subject you are choosing to apply for will depend on the most relevant activities for you. Some students might have undertaken additional academic reading, others will focus on their vocational skills and undertaken placements.

Remember you only have 4000 characters and several well expressed examples can be plenty if written about well. University tutors like to see that you have connected your experiences and learning to your chosen field of study.



Work Experience

Use contacts you might have, parents, friends, uncles, grannies, neighbours etc if someone works in an environment that might be slightly relevant then see if you can complete work experience.

It doesn't have to be a whole week, it could be an afternoon or couple of days, what is important is that you get something out of it and can link it to your application.

If you are looking for something which might be more competitive take a look at GoThinkBig.co.uk which is an online digital hub bringing you information on exciting work experience opportunities with big name companies.

Volunteering

Its not too late to try to complete some useful volunteering...and it can be helpful for a whole range of applications. Specifically social sciences or where communicating with 'people' play a key part of the role, subject or career.

One of the best places to look is with charities. Many are run like businesses so experience in this environment can be a way of considering a huge range of different career options. The best place to try to get started is www.do-it.org and search for opportunities near you.

Employment

If you have a job it can be useful to mention, if it's relevant. For example if you work in a retail clothing store and applying for Business Studies degree, link this to what you have witnessed. Promotions, customer service, store layout and staff training are all things you can link to your knowledge and skills.

If your employment is less related then use it to draw on your soft skills (time management, collaboration, listening and flexibility).

Some students choose just to include their part-time work in the 'Employment' section of their UCAS form and use valuable space in their statement for more relevant content.



Useful wider reading resources

The best thing about extra-curricular activities is that you are free to follow your own lines of enquiry into the areas that interest you the most. You should take time to explore things that you genuinely find interesting and see where your investigations lead you

The Conversation (www.theconversation.com) is an independent source of news and views, sourced from the academic and research community and delivered direct to the public. The topics are directly from university research.

Future Learn (www.futurelearn.com) is where you can complete a massive open online course (MOOC). This is free and you can access the content from home, you can sign up and complete topics that suit you. Choose from hundreds of free online courses to expand your knowledge, there are new ones starting all the time.

Reading quality news sources can be a useful way to encounter stories relevant to your academic interests. Newspapers are still a really good resource of information; choose broadsheets such as The Guardian, The Times, Independent, Daily Telegraph. Many charge for online access, but speak to your library / resource centre as they often buy access for schools and colleges.

BBC News online at www.bbc.co.uk. Sign up for alerts or if you download the app customize the news you want to see.

Google Scholar. You can search academic publications via scholar.google.co.uk. Also handy if you are researching for your EPQ!

Get Listening (or Watching)

Podcasts are everywhere but it is worthwhile to look on BBC iPlayer radio for factual radio programmes. There are special reports on BBC Radio 4 and the World Service which can be a good listen if you have a few minutes. Use the search feature to find something relevant for you. www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts

TED Talks are a huge bank of free knowledge from the world's most inspired thinkers, talks covering a huge range of topics and ideas. www.ted.com/talks

iTunes U is a dedicated section of Apple's iTunes that features educational audio and video files from universities, museums and public media organizations for free download to PCs and mobile devices. Get the app from www.itunes.apple.com

Top Tip

In everything you write do not just describe but REFLECT on your experiences and skills and RELATE them to your chosen course or career. To help you think about your skills you may want to use ABC:

- A – Action Being part of a sports team, voluntary work in a care home, school prefect or reading a particular book
- B – Benefits What skills do these roles give you – teamwork, responsibility, time management, what insight did you gain from your reading.
- C – Course Relate these skills and experiences to the course you want to study or the career it will lead to.

The more you can say about your chosen subject and the extent of your engagement with it the better.